

Carbondale Became City 15 Years Before Scranton-Miss Rashleigh

Miss Alice Voyle Rashleigh's historical review of Carbondale continues in today's issue of The News, the installment presented being the third.

In her contribution today, Miss Rashleigh touches upon the subjects of "The Parade Ground" and roaming pigs, the first bell brought to Carbondale, floods and fires. **Not to overlook a sentence of civic pride—one telling that Carbondale was a city 15 years before Scranton and 20 years before Wilkes-Barre.**

We will permit Miss Rashleigh to go on from here. Her third installment:

"The Parade Ground" has become Memorial Park. It was the scene of circuses and animals roamed at will. An ordinance passed in 1852 was as follows: "No swine, shoats, pigs or hogs shall be suffered to run at large within the city limits". Another one was: "the appointment of an inspector of chimneys and stove pipes for protection against fires".

William Jessup, the members of whose family gave to Beirut, Syria, many missionaries, as President Judge of the Judicial District, presided over the mayor's court, the first session being held in the Methodist Church May 13, 1851. Dwight Lathrope and Alfred Dart also presided over this court which was abolished by the Constitution of 1873.

Thus began the real city government 15 years before Scranton became a city and 20 years before Wilkes-Barre had a city charter.

The first bell brought to Carbondale was purchased by the Presbyterian congregation. It was hung in the modest little church and used for all public functions. It rang out the beginning of each work day and called the laborers home at noon and evening. Too, it awoke people in time of fire and it was used as a curfew. It also tolled the exact number of years of the life of any departed citizen of prominence.

I have been told the bell used in Mt. Carmel church was once used in a Court House in Carbondale's early days.

Before we had a fire system, Elias Thomas, one of the Welsh Miners, kept watch over the city for 28 years, tooting 1, 2, 3, or 4, on the gong of Gravity engine 28, according to the ward where he saw a light in the sky. It was indeed terrifying as "28" was directly back of our home. In the late 80's, "28" burned in the early morning. We feared sparks might reach our home and began gathering things together to be ready in any even.

Afterward, Mother asked: "What treasure did you save?"

"Just a boy's picture," I replied, and she just looked at me, thinking I was silly. But then folks do silly things at a time like that.

On July 18, 1850, heavy rain caused the Durfee Dam, a mile above the village of Racket Brook, to give way. The torrent swept everything before it, through Church and Main streets. The Lackawanna rushed over its banks and flowed into the mines.

Another flood in April, 1862, came from the West Side, when the old High Works part of the Gravity was displaced. I have heard my grandmother say that some of it was in our back yard and that the family left the house and went over to the East Side of the river.

Following the flood of 1850, came a disastrous fire in September. It started in the Carbondale House and the space burned over extended from the Parade Ground, north on Main street and the West Side of Church street, where 60 buildings were destroyed.

Another fire started in Bronson's Railway Hotel, September, 1855, destroying the hotel, and many buildings. I believe this hotel was located where Woolworth's store now operates. A troupe of players—show people—were playing cards and were responsible for the fire.

In '59, a fire burned the Harrison House (M. & M. Bank building), and the stores and offices on the west side of Main street between City Hall and Salem avenue.

In 1866, the East side of Main street from Salem avenue down, suffered a vast loss of property. The entire business section below City Hall was burned in 1867. The fire destroyed 40 stores and shops, leaving 60 families homeless.

In 1852, a wooden courthouse was erected. This was burned in 1859, being set afire by "U-Know, U-Know", a drunken prisoner who set fire to the mattress in his cell. He was burned to death. This Court House had two stairways leading up to the entrance. Mother and other children had their fun running up one stairway and down the other. A brick building replaced this wooden structure, and later it was enlarged.